

Number of Scots facing hunger and hardship at record levels - study



By Craig Williams Reporter

The number of people in Scotland facing hunger and hardship has reached record levels (*Image: PA*)

The number of people in Scotland facing hunger and hardship has reached record levels, according to a report.

Research by the anti-poverty charity Trussell found that 670,000 Scots – including 170,000 children – are struggling to afford food.

The charity said the number of people facing hunger and hardship today is 24% higher than it was two decades ago.

Its Cost of Hunger and Hardship report, a partnership with public policy experts WPI Economics, analysed government data to track people living “well below” the poverty line who are most at risk of using a food bank.

Researchers found that around one in six (17%) children in Scotland reached this criteria.

They also found that 325,000 people struggling with hardship and hunger were in a family where at least one person worked.

And 390,000 people struggling were living in a family where someone had a disability.

Trussell has called on the Scottish and UK Governments to take urgent action to lift Scots out of poverty.

The charity urged Westminster to introduce an essentials guarantee into Universal Credit which it said would lift 195,000 people out of hardship in Scotland.

The report said the UK Government lifting the controversial two-child benefit cap would mean 45,000 fewer children in Scotland experienced such poverty.

Trussell also urged the Scottish Government to increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 a week – which it said would ensure 65,000 fewer people facing hunger and poverty.

It comes just days after a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) found that the number of people living in “very deep poverty” has surged 26% since the mid-1990s.

The anti-poverty charity said one million Scots – including about 24,000 children – are in poverty due to inaction from both Holyrood and Westminster.

The JRF said the country’s social security system was failing families and called for reform to Universal Credit.

Trussell said the ministers must “significantly scale up” their plans to tackle poverty.

Cara Hilton, senior policy and public affairs manager with the charity in Scotland, said: “We welcome the Scottish Government’s ambition to end the need for food banks, but our research shows that a record number of people in Scotland now face hunger and hardship.

“If we are to shift this dial and if the Scottish Government is to achieve its own child poverty targets then current actions to tackle hunger must be significantly scaled up and much better resourced.

“In its upcoming budget, we would urge the Scottish Government to increase the Scottish Child Payment to £40 a week and increase investment into affordable housing and into crisis support, through the Scottish Welfare Fund.

“And with larger families most at risk of hardship, the Scottish Government should act to mitigate the two-child cap in Scotland.”

Social Justice Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville said: “No one should have to compromise on food or other essentials.

“We are taking forward nine actions over three years (2023-2026), to improve the response to crisis, using a cash-first approach so that fewer people need to turn to food parcels.

“Our five family payments, including Scottish Child Payment, the Best Start Grants and Best Start Foods, could be worth over £10,000 by the time an eligible child turns six and around £25,000 by the time an eligible child turns 16.

“Although faced with difficult choices in the Budget, we increased the Scottish Child Payment in line with inflation to £26.70 in April 2024.

“As of June 2024, more than 325,000 under-16s were benefitting from the Scottish Child Payment, which is not available anywhere else in the UK and modelling published in February estimated Scottish Government policies will keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty this year, with the Scottish Child Payment alone keeping 60,000 children out of poverty.

“As a Government, we have spent around £1.2 billion mitigating the impacts of 14 years of harmful UK Government policies such as the bedroom tax, and we continue to call for the UK Government to scrap the two-child limit, given the irrefutable evidence that the policy is increasing poverty and hardship across the UK.”

A UK Government spokesperson said: “No child should be in poverty – that’s why our new cross-government taskforce is developing an ambitious strategy to reduce child poverty across the United Kingdom and give children the best start in life.

“We have committed to reviewing Universal Credit while we deliver on our plan to tackle inequality and make work pay to ensure families in Scotland